

Sun, Steam, and Marigolds by ThrillingDetectiveTales

Series: [Tumblr Jukebox \[17\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Billy Hargrove Lives, Domestic Fluff, M/M, Post-Canon

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Steve Harrington

Relationships: Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

Status: Completed

Published: 2021-06-22

Updated: 2021-06-22

Packaged: 2022-03-31 13:54:28

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,798

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Twelve years after Billy should have died at Starcourt Mall, he and Steve prepare to attend a cookout.

Sun, Steam, and Marigolds

Author's Note:

Tumblr Jukebox strikes again! This fill for a lovely anon who requested Steve/Billy. The song this fic is titled after, and which inspired the contents herein, was "Quartz," by TV On The Radio, off one of my favorite albums of all time. Video is embedded below for reference.

Not beta-read, mostly just plotless fluff. Enjoy!

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June 14, 1997

Billy was just running his hand through his hair one last time when Steve's voice echoed from the general vicinity of the kitchen.

"Hey, Bill?"

"Yes, princess?" Billy hollered, leaning back to peer past the doorway to the master bathroom, through the bedroom, and on into the hall.

He couldn't see Steve from here, of course, considering that he was on the other side of the house, but something about the rumpled bedsheets and the matching nightstands and the helplessly jumbled array of shirts that Billy could just make out where the closet was cracked open never failed to send a hot wave of satisfaction rolling slowly through his gut. It was the evidence of a shared life, something Billy had never imagined he would have with anyone as an angry, fucked up nineteen-year-old, let alone Steve 'The Hair' Harrington, of all people, but there it was. Plain as day.

The bedclothes were perpetually shoved down on Steve's side, though Billy at least made a half-hearted effort to pull his own up and put them in some sort of order each morning. It was a holdover from decades of meticulously effecting hospital corners under his father's watchful eye. Billy wasn't a neatnik by any stretch, but there was a

certain amount of tidiness that had been ingrained into him too deeply and violently to ever get it out.

The end table nearest the bathroom had one of the paperback thrillers Billy liked to read before bed splayed open facedown on its slightly timeworn surface. The other played host to an unobtrusive table lamp—flicked on in the small hours of morning on the rarer and rarer occasion that one of Steve’s nightmares woke him—and the little wooden trinket box that housed the few keepsake accessories Steve had accumulated over the years. Billy could list off every single one of them by heart, and was responsible for the addition of about half.

Most prominently displayed was the friendship bracelet that Max and El had woven for Steve the summer before he and Billy packed up and moved to Indianapolis. The threads were dingy with age, and the cheap charm dangling from the center had left Steve with a persistent green spot on his wrist, but he had worn it every day until the daintily braided tail keeping it knotted around his wrist snapped in two. Still it hung in pride of place, looped over the corner of the dish’s propped open lid.

There was also a spare pair of glasses—the same oversized, gold wireframes that Steve had started wearing a few years back, when daily contacts became too much of a nuisance to keep up with—and a cheap mood ring Billy’d won him on one of their first dates at the Hawkins County Fair back in high school. On occasion, Billy’s Saint Christopher medallion—inherited from his mother and given to a blotchy-faced, teary-eyed Steve on their first anniversary, as a token of Billy’s affection and commitment—would wind up in the trinket box, too, for safekeeping, but Steve much preferred to wear it.

Finally, crumpled into the corner and nearly buried under a pile of torn off ticket stubs and scraps of notebook paper and haphazardly folded Post-Its, was the ostentatious Two-Tone Datejust Rolex that Steve’s father had given him for his high school graduation, not long before they stopped speaking. Steve had almost pawned it once, right after they moved out, when rent was overdue and steady paychecks thin on the ground between them, but Billy’d managed to convince him to hold onto it. Billy wasn’t a particularly sentimental creature and never had been, with the notable exception of the

aforementioned medallion, but Steve was.

He would have mourned the damn watch every day if he'd hawked it in a fit of pique.

Every once in awhile—usually right after they'd met Steve's mother for dinner in the city and suffered through a few hours' discussion of her most recent adventures as a beautiful, wealthy divorcée—Billy caught Steve sitting up in bed with the watch in hand and staring at the inscription on the back.

For Steven, to keep track of all the good times ahead. Love, Dad.

So much for that, Billy thought with an unamused snort, though it was uncharitable of him. After all, he and Steve'd had plenty of good times between them these last ten years. It was just that Steve's father hadn't factored in since those first ugly months when he decided to divorce Steve's mother and cut ties with his queer son in one fell swoop.

As if summoned by Billy's thoughts, Steve's voice rang out again.

"You almost ready?"

Billy jumped and fell back into the moment like a stone to the bottom of a pond.

"Yeah!" he confirmed. "I'll be out in just a second!"

There was a distant sound of grumbling and then a faucet turned on. Steve was probably drinking straight from the tap, again, even though they had a perfectly good set of freshly washed glasses in the cabinet. Max and Susan had taken it upon themselves to replace every one of Steve and Billy's chipped and mismatched dishes as a housewarming gift when they'd signed the lease on this place a few short months before. Billy shook his head and narrowed his eyes at his own reflection.

He turned this way and that, giving himself a final, cursory once-over and determining that he looked good. The days of stylishly coiffed mullets and dangling earrings may be a decade or so behind him, but Billy wasn't doing so bad for a guy pushing thirty. He wore a simple

silver hoop most days, or occasionally the diamond stud Steve'd bought him for his twenty-first, and kept his hair cropped short on the sides and long enough on top for the occasional stray curl to flop onto his forehead.

He wasn't as cut as he'd been in his late teens, but then he didn't work out for an hour and a half a day, anymore. His work at Espinosa Automotive and Truck Repair kept him in decent enough shape, and Steve didn't seem to mind that he'd filled out somewhat, if the way he moaned when Billy laid on top of him and pushed him down into their mattress was any indication.

Billy tugged the hem of his shirt down and smoothed his palm over the faded and peeling design on the breast—a silhouette of a shield with the Indianapolis skyline inside of it, printed in navy blue on the heathered grey fabric. The back of the shirt read '*17th ANNUAL IMPD 5K FUN RUN*' in big, blue and white block letters. Okay, so it was technically Steve's, but Billy had staked his claim on it some years ago, when Steve was first hired on as a uniformed officer with the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department. It had started off soft and been worn even thinner and softer through frequent washings, which made it ideal for Billy to slip on underneath his workplace coveralls. After the first two or three times it went missing from Steve's pajama drawer he'd ceded ownership.

"Come on, Bill!" Steve whined. "We're gonna be late!"

"Okay, okay! Jesus!" Billy smacked the light switch and shuffled through the bedroom in his socks. "Hold your fucking horses, I'm coming."

He grabbed a small duffel bag off the end of the bed and slung it over his shoulder. It wasn't very heavy, packed with a simple change of clothes and a handful of toiletries and a couple of gifts he'd meant to mail months earlier. There were similar forgotten treasures in Steve's bag, he knew, so he didn't feel too bad about it. He gave the room a quick glance to make sure he wasn't forgetting anything before he hit the switch there, too, and meandered out into the hall.

He found Steve in the kitchen, wearing a pair of light wash jeans and [the terrible color-blocked button down](#) he'd seen on a department

store mannequin a few months before and fallen into immediate and unwavering love with. Billy could just make out the chain of his—now, Steve’s—necklace glinting under the collar. He dropped his bag onto one of the chairs at the kitchen table and stepped into Steve’s space, boxing him in against the counter.

“You look like Easter threw up on you,” Billy offered, cupping his hand over one of Steve’s cheeks and leaning in to smack a quick kiss to the other.

“Thanks,” Steve drawled, and reached out to squeeze Billy’s hip in turn. “You look - ” his eyes skimmed Billy’s frame, from the shirt to his jeans, which were tight enough to leave very little to the imagination, and he swallowed hard.

Billy hummed, pleased and amused, and angled his head for a proper kiss.

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” he murmured against Steve’s mouth a few long, slick seconds later.

“Oh, it definitely is,” Steve agreed, and slipped a hand into Billy’s back pocket. He reached up to pluck at the shirt where it laid against the plane of Billy’s stomach and sighed, “Y’know, it’s really not fair that you look better in my clothes than I do.”

“It’s all the sit-ups,” Billy confided, and laughed when Steve wrinkled his nose in distaste. Steve was active by necessity but it was clear from his big doe eyes to his soft, elegant hands that he’d been bred for leisure. Billy looped his arms casually around Steve’s shoulders, like they were a couple of twelve-year-olds at a school dance.

“Not all of us can have the metabolism of a teenager, Harrington,” he said, real low like he was sharing a secret. “Some people actually have to *work* to maintain their physiques.”

Steve snorted and rolled his eyes. He bumped his nose against Billy’s and said, quiet and so serious that it circled back around to playful, “I appreciate your sacrifice.”

Billy hummed again and hooked his fingers over the hem of Steve’s

front pocket, knuckles brushing Steve's hip through the fabric of his pants and whatever underwear he'd thrown on underneath.

"Maybe when we get back," Billy rumbled, "you can show me how much."

Steve sucked a sharp breath and kissed him again. He kept one hand in Billy's pocket and brought the other up to curl around the back of his neck, big and warm and possessive. Billy moaned, short and soft, and Steve broke away long enough to mutter, "Don't."

Billy smiled at him and made a slow show of licking his lower lip. "Don't what?"

"You *know* what," Steve huffed, and darted in to kiss him again, hard and fast. "You start that shit and we're never getting out of here." He glanced at his watch—a simple black Casio face with a digital readout and a nylon strap—and grimaced. "It's an hour and a half to Hawkins and we're already running like twenty minutes behind."

Billy rolled his eyes and stepped away, heading for the shoe rack in front of the door. There was a pair of black high-tops that had seen better days lined up next to two battered pairs of off-brand running shoes and the spit-polished, square-toed loafers Steve wore for work. It wasn't the same pair of high-tops that Billy'd worn in high school, but a set that had been purchased to replace them not long after, held together with hope and the creative application of duct tape. Billy started tugging one on and glanced back at Steve over his shoulder.

"What's the big deal, man? It's a barbecue, not a - " he searched for an appropriate comparison for a second and settled on, " - a fuckin' black tie dinner. Who gives a shit if we're late?"

"Nothing," Steve said. "No deal." He ran his hand through his hair, looking sheepish and vaguely wild-eyed, which meant that there *was* a deal, he just didn't want to admit to it.

Billy arched an eyebrow and stared Steve down until he sighed, "It's just, Will's bringing his boyfriend home for the first time."

"Oh, right," Billy nodded and pulled his other shoe on. "What's his

name—Declan? Dermond? Devlin?” He squinted and screwed his face up, really playing up his confusion.

“It’s Deon,” Steve corrected, thoroughly unimpressed. “You know that. I *know* you know that, because you’re the one who told *me*.”

Billy grinned and straightened, wiggling his toes and knocking his heels against the ground to get his feet settled. He grabbed his trusty denim jacket and shrugged it on, cutting Steve a pointed look.

“Don’t tell me you’re nervous.”

“No!” Steve yelped, face a picture of affront while Billy chuckled. “Not *nervous*, exactly, I just - I want to be there, y’know? Just in case.”

Jesus fucking Christ, Bill thought. Steve’s bleeding heart was going to get him killed one day, the stupid, loveable bastard. He beckoned Steve over and Steve came with a long-suffering sigh. When he was close enough, Billy reeled him in with a fistful of his tacky shirt, taking care not to compromise any of the buttons or wrinkle it too irreparably.

“Aw, Stevie,” Billy said, flattening his palm against Steve’s stomach and dragging it around to Steve’s lean side. “I think it’s real sweet that you want to be there for Baby Byers.” He brought his other hand up to curl over Steve’s cheek and swept his thumb in a little, absent arc. “You know it’s gonna be fine, right? Everybody’s had ten fucking years of dealing with our bullshit to prepare them for it.”

“I know.” Steve leaned into Billy’s hand, turning his face just far enough to press a dry, messy kiss to the heel of Billy’s palm. His breath was hot against Billy’s skin when he spoke. “I just remember what it was like, y’know? Right at first. How much it sucked.”

“Only thing I remember sucking was - ” Billy started, but Steve reached up and clapped a hand over his mouth before he could finish.

“I’m not talking about *that*, you pervert,” he laughed. His skin was warm and the familiar spice of his cologne was strong at his wrist. He

let his hand linger for a second and then dropped it back down to his side, continuing in a smaller, almost shy voice, "I just meant - it was hard for awhile, right?"

Billy took a long breath through his nose and sighed it back out.

"Yeah," he admitted in a dry rasp. "It was hard."

'Hard' was something of an understatement. Right at first, it had been damn near impossible, and Billy had the hospital records and the protective order served against his father to prove it. He ducked his chin and cleared his throat before meeting Steve's gaze again, sweet and dark and bottomless.

He stared for a second, bowled over yet again by the simple fact that Steve fucking Harrington, the boy of Billy's teenage dreams, who couldn't even be bothered to give him the time of day over the first few months of their acquaintance, was standing here with him, twelve years into a future they'd built together. He licked his lips, quirked his eyebrows, and smirked.

"Not so hard now, though, huh?"

Steve huffed a bare breath of a laugh.

"No," he agreed, bringing his hands up and grabbing loosely at Billy's lapels. "Not anymore." He paused, considering for a second, and amended in a sly, salacious drawl, "Well, *sometimes*," before claiming Billy's mouth with a searing kiss that turned Billy's legs halfway to jelly underneath him.

Steve didn't move away when he came up for air. He left his forehead pressed against Billy's, glasses fogging with the heat between them.

"Thought you said not to start that shit," Billy gasped, rough and breathless. He turned his face so his nose bumped against Steve's—once, twice, again, soft and affectionate.

"Sorry," Steve chuckled, though it was clear from his tone and from the way he tipped his chin up for one more slow, wicked kiss that he didn't mean it.

Billy hummed into Steve's mouth, then forced himself a step back. He gave Steve's hip a squeeze and a fond little pat, jerking his head toward the kitchen.

"Better grab the macaroni salad, there, Casanova," he said. "Henderson's bound to riot if you leave it behind."

Steve's macaroni salad—the recipe for which had been passed down by his patrilineal grandmother and then rarely put to use, as Steve's parents had always preferred to cater their parties—was a hit at these annual family cookouts, but Henderson's affection for it bordered on obscene.

Steve sighed, muttered, "Fine," and kissed Billy again, just at the corner of his mouth, then went to do what he was told.

Author's Note:

Thanks for reading!

If you'd like to participate in Tumblr Jukebox, you can check out the link at the top of my Tumblr profile. (@thrillingdetectivetales)